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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001152

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: AL WIFAQ LEADERS MEET WITH MINISTER OF INTERIOR

REF: A. MANAMA 1036

[B](#). MANAMA 943

[C](#). MANAMA 885

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) Several board members of leading Shi'a opposition political society Al Wifaq met with the Minister of Interior August 6 and discussed the police role at political demonstrations; employment of Bahrainis in the police and defense forces; an alleged travel ban on former political activists; compensation for victims of torture; and independent inspections of the country's prisons. Though their discussion did not result in any concrete agreements, both sides praised the meeting as a step towards warmer relations between the GOB and the organization.

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Al Wifaq leaders meet with Minister of Interior  
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2. (SBU) Al Wifaq President Sheikh Ali Salman, Vice President Hassan Mushaima, and board members Jawad Fairouz (who also serves as Northern Area Municipal Council Vice Chairman), Murtada Bader (also Capital Area Municipal Council Chairman), and Sakina Al Ekri met with Minister of Interior Sheikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa August 6. Al Wifaq issued a statement afterward saying that the "positive and honest" meeting resulted in a renewed commitment from both sides to promote the national interest. According to the press, the Al Wifaq representatives present told Sheikh Rashid that the Ministry of Interior (MOI) normally plays a positive role in managing public demonstrations, though alleged police abuse at a July 15 rally was out of line and should be investigated (Ref A). The Al Wifaq leaders also praised Sheikh Rashid for bringing more Bahrainis, especially Bahraini Shi'a, into the police, and encouraged him to continue hiring Bahrainis to help improve the unemployment situation. (Note: As in other Gulf countries, the security forces and military employ many (Arab and Sunni Muslim) foreigners. End Note.)

3. (C) According to press reports, the Al Wifaq representatives expressed concern during the meeting that the GOB has imposed a travel ban on some political activists. Sheikh Rashid asked for a list of the individuals who believe they are subject to the travel ban. The two sides also discussed compensation for former political prisoners who were allegedly tortured or killed in the 1990s. GOB officials privately told EmbOff that the government is willing to consider paying compensation to the victims but will not issue a statement of responsibility. The Al Wifaq representatives asked if their society could monitor prisons in Bahrain, and the Minister replied that human rights organizations - but not political societies - were authorized to inspect prisons.

4. (C) Al Wifaq board member Nizar Al Qari (who did not attend the meeting) told Poloff that the meeting was a positive move. He said that if the GOB participates in a dialogue with opposition leaders, issues can be taken up in offices instead of on the streets. Al Qari added that by bringing more Shi'a youth into the police, the MOI would increase stability and decrease radicalism. He noted that Shi'a members of the security forces who were hired in recent years have stopped going to hardline mosques and majlises and are not active in the opposition anymore. They are more concerned with getting married and buying a car than politics. An MOI representative told EmbOff August 8 that the Minister hoped to meet with Al Wifaq representatives regularly so that the opposition would have an opportunity to express itself and not have to resort to demonstrations.

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Comment  
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5. (C) The Minister of Interior's meeting with Al Wifaq eased some of the tension between the GOB and the opposition.

Opposition leaders often say that if they had an open dialogue with GOB officials, they would feel much less frustrated by political issues. The Minister's offer to meet was a positive step, and Al Wifaq leaders' attendance is much more productive than the hostile approach some activists have taken in recent weeks. Unfortunately, a more radicalized element in the Shi'a opposition, most prominently personified by Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, rejects a true dialogue with the government and continues to carry out provocative acts, as seen in the June 19 and July 15 unemployment demonstrations and the June 29 ceremony held by the Islamic Action Society "honoring" coup plotters from the 1980's (reftels).

ZIADEH